

Questions & Answers about Missouri's New High School Graduation Requirements

The Missouri State Board of Education has adopted new requirements for all students who graduate from public high schools in Missouri. The new minimum standards apply to the Class of 2010. Here are some common questions about the new standards.

What is significant about the new standards?

The minimum number of credits needed to graduate will increase to 24. The current requirement of 22 units has been in place for 20 years. The new standards put more emphasis on the core academic areas by requiring 4 units of English and 3 units each in math, science and social studies. Compared with the previous standards, this means that many students will be required to complete one additional unit in each of the core academic areas. (Some school districts may have already required the additional credits in these subjects.)

In addition, there will be NEW requirements for a half-unit course (one semester) in “personal finance” and a half-unit course in health education. (See next page for specific questions regarding the required course in personal finance.)

Do the new graduation standards apply to private or parochial schools?

No.

Do these standards apply to transfer students?

Local school boards already have policies that govern the awarding of credit and diplomas to students who transfer in during grades 9-12. Districts may wish to review and update such policies to reflect the state's new minimum standards and any local requirements.

Who may teach the required health class?

Any person with a valid Missouri teaching certificate in health education or family and consumer sciences may teach the required health course.

Can students satisfy graduation standards with “embedded credits”?

State education officials anticipate that this will be possible. For example, it should be possible in the future to verify if a student has mastered enough math or science competencies in other courses to qualify for math or science credit. Use of such “embedded credits” could give students the flexibility to take a larger number and variety of courses in high school.

Schools that want to consider the use of embedded credits must submit a formal proposal, including an assessment plan, to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for approval before using this method to award academic credit.

May schools use non-traditional methods to grant credit to students?

The policy approved by the State Board of Education specifies the number of minutes that a class must meet in order for a student to earn a traditional unit of credit. The policy also states: “However, if a student demonstrates mastery of the required competencies of a course, the district may grant credit through an alternative method with prior approval by DESE. Alternative time schedules may be approved if requested by the district.”

The intent of this “alternative method” policy is to allow local and state school officials to develop creative and flexible learning opportunities for young people, while assuring academic rigor and quality in non-traditional course offerings.

State education officials are working to develop guidelines and procedures that will assist school districts that wish to explore alternative methods of awarding academic credit. The publication of grade-level expectations (GLEs) for various subjects should provide a firm basis for identifying required course competencies. Students and schools are likely to want more “virtual learning” opportunities in the future, and the new state policy will allow schools to consider awarding credit to students who complete virtual courses.

State education officials also intend to continue exploring the feasibility of course-specific competency tests that could be used by high schools as a basis for awarding academic credit. Such exams could be developed by the state, by local school districts, or by a consortium of high schools. If they become available, such state-approved, end-of-course tests would provide the means for students to “test out” of a class and earn credit for that subject.

Will the College Preparatory Studies Certificate still be awarded?

The College Preparatory Studies Certificate, issued by the State Board of Education to recognize graduates who exceed minimum graduation standards, will be available for use by public and private high schools through 2009. Details about the requirements for the College Preparatory Studies Certificate are published by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and are available online.

Questions about Personal Finance

When should personal finance be taught?

Classes in personal finance may be offered in grades 10, 11 and 12. Each student’s transcript must indicate that he or she earned a passing grade in this course.

Where does personal finance fit in the curriculum?

Personal finance may be categorized as a practical arts course, a social studies course or as a stand-alone course.

Who may teach personal finance?

The school district should select the most qualified person to teach the course. The instructor must hold a valid Missouri teaching certificate.

How may the personal finance class be counted for credit?

If the personal finance class is offered in the practical arts department, it may be counted to meet: (1) the personal finance requirement; and (2) as one-half of the required credit in practical arts. If personal finance is offered in the social studies department, it may be counted to meet: (1) the personal finance requirement; and (2) as a half-unit (0.5) of the 3 units of required social studies. In either of these cases, the electives available to a student would increase to 7.5 units, and the student would earn the full 24 units of credit required for graduation.

Is DESE developing a model curriculum and assessment?

Yes. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is working with the Missouri Center for Career Education, located at Central Missouri State University, to develop and publish a model, problem-based curriculum for high schools to use in teaching personal finance. It should be available by summer 2006. When the model curriculum is ready, professional development workshops will be offered for teachers and school officials.

State education officials also are exploring the feasibility of developing a state-level assessment that could be used as a competency exam in personal finance. A final decision has not been made about this assessment.

A list of recommended competencies has been developed to provide a foundation for personal finance classes. The competencies were developed by an advisory committee of business representatives; higher education officials; the Centers for Economics Education; and teachers from the areas of family and consumer sciences, business education and social studies. The competencies may be viewed on the DESE Web site (Division of Career Education).

Are high schools required to use the model curriculum?

No.

What is the course code for personal finance?

The Core Data course code for personal finance is 996400.

**For more information, please contact:**

Ginny Vandelight, Director of School Improvement Support
Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
573-526-4885